



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Remarks of Sen. Chuck Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance
before the Congressional Economic Leadership Institute
“Salvation or Starvation? GMO Food Aid to Africa”
Wednesday, March 5, 2003

I'm pleased to participate in this event on biotechnology and food aid to Africa. There are few topics more important than the one we are discussing today. The situation in Africa is indeed a tragedy. Some 13 million people in southern Africa faced starvation within the past year. The United States, as one of the richest and most productive agriculture nations on earth, rightly offered food aid to stop innocent people from suffering. However, some African countries rejected U.S. donations of corn due to a misplaced fear of biotechnology. Zambia refuses any shipments of U.S. food aid that consists of biotech products even though its population is on the brink of starvation.

Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Mozambique will only accept U.S. shipments if the corn is milled prior to being distributed. It is shameful to me that the leaders of some southern African countries, who are apparently well-fed, would rather see their populations go hungry than eat the same food we consume daily in the United States. Scaremongers have propagated misinformation regarding biotechnology. Rumors spread in Africa that biotech foods can cause allergies, lead to deformities, and result in other health and environmental calamities. Nothing could be further from the truth. If these products were unhealthy, we wouldn't consume them in the United States. If they harmed the environment, we wouldn't be growing them in Iowa. In short, misinformation about the so-called dangers posed by biotechnology is threatening lives in Africa.

The European Union is partly to blame for the situation in Africa. By refusing to adopt scientifically-based laws regarding biotechnology, the EU has fed the myth that biotech crops are somehow dangerous. Ironically, the European Union itself has approved some biotech crops as safe. At the same time, the European Union has refused to end its moratorium on biotech authorizations, a situation that has led other countries to assume that biotech products are somehow dangerous. The European Union's lack of science-based biotech laws is unacceptable, and it is threatening the health of millions of Africans. I am particularly troubled by reports that some EU member states have warned that their relations with poorer countries, including those in Africa, could be harmed if those countries accept U.S. biotech food aid. Any such threats are unacceptable. Food aid should not be used as a bargaining chip. The world is at a turning point with regard to agricultural biotechnology. On one hand, we can embrace biotechnology and use it to fight hunger in Africa and other parts of the world. On the other hand, the world can reject biotechnology and the promises it holds for African farmers, African consumers, and others throughout the world. To me, the answer is clear: just as agricultural biotechnology benefits those of us in the United States, it can benefit millions of people in Africa.

With that, I am pleased to turn the program over to Grant Aldonas, Under Secretary for International Trade Administration at the U.S. Department of Commerce. I had the privilege of working with Grant when he served as Chief International Trade Counsel of the Senate Finance Committee, a committee I now chair. He's a hard worker, and he's bending over backwards to bring sanity to the international debate concerning biotechnology. I know that Grant has gone head-to-head with the Europeans concerning U.S. food aid to Africa. Grant knows more about international trade than about anyone in Washington. He's been involved with trade issues throughout most of his career. Besides working at the Finance Committee, he formerly served as Director of South American and Caribbean Affairs at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Grant was at one time employed at the State Department. He has also practiced international trade law at a firm here in Washington. Grant is a native of Minnesota, so he's not far from being an Iowan. He received both his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Minnesota.